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ABSTRACT

This study sought to put a human face on child care finances in New York City by documenting the everyday struggles of low-income working families, and those making the transition from welfare to work, who are unable to obtain good quality, stable child care. The Children's Aid Society surveyed 150 parents on child care waiting lists maintained by established community-based child care agencies. Specific findings were: (1) 77 percent of families believed that their current child care situations were negatively affecting their children; (2) over 70 percent of families used an unregulated child care arrangement; (3) 49 percent of families with incomes of $6,000 to $12,000 spent between 20 and 50 percent of their income on child care; (4) 36 percent of parents said they were either unable to work or had lost their jobs, 20 percent said they had been late or missed work, and 16 percent went on public assistance because of lack of quality child care; (5) 64 percent of parents said they wanted child care that emphasized education and school readiness skills; (6) families participating in welfare-to-work activities did not know about their rights to a range of subsidized child care options and the availability of transitional child care benefits once they left welfare for work; and (7) many low-income working families did not know that they were eligible for a child care subsidy, nor that the Agency for Child Development exists and is the primary city agency responsible for providing child care assistance. Based on the findings, recommendations to improve the quality of child care in New York City were devised, including: (1) additional child care funding must be used to expand the supply of regulated, high quality child care; and (2) a single agency should administer all child care subsidies in the city. (EV)

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THE HUMAN COST OF WAITING FOR CHILD CARE: A STUDY

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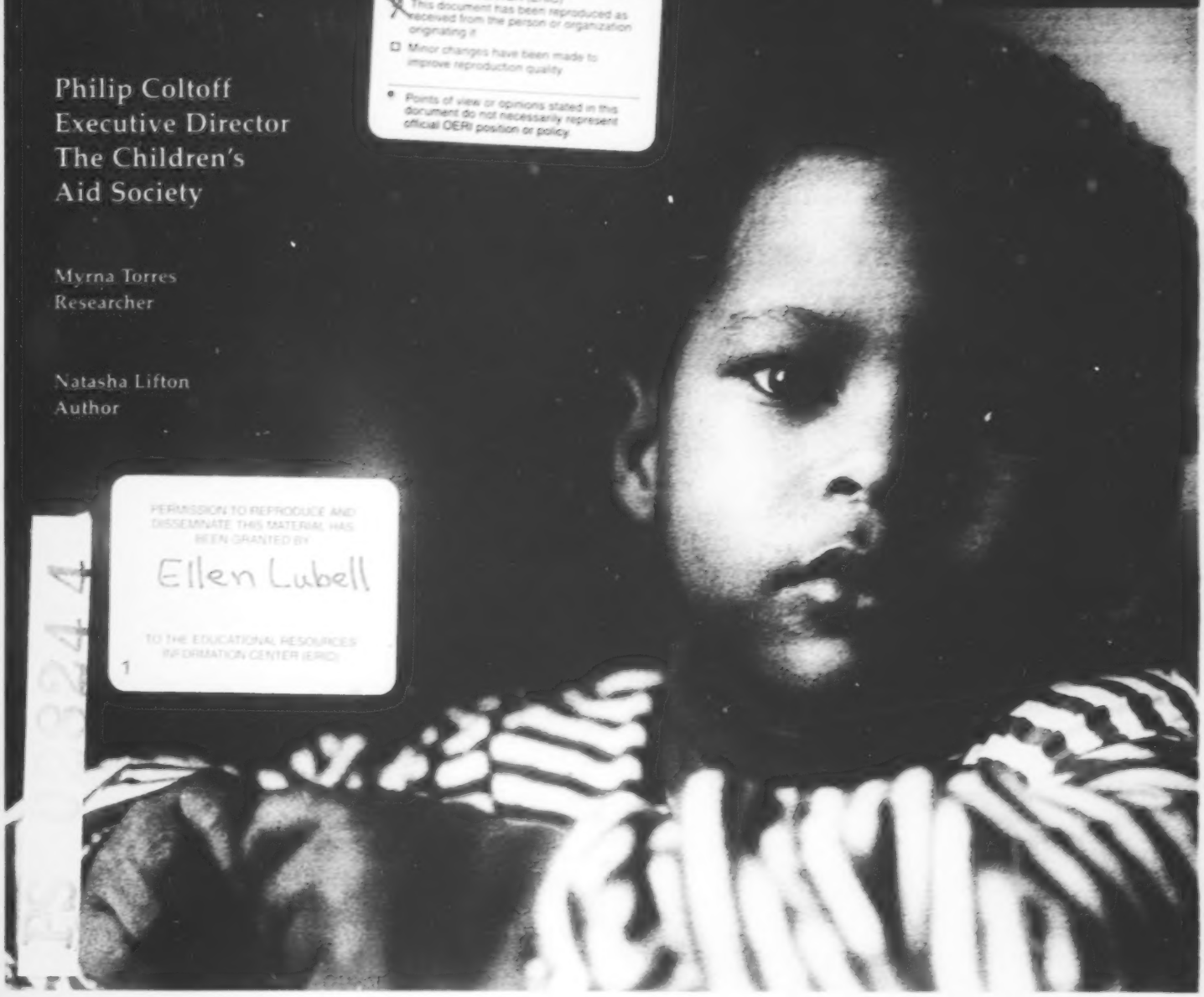

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December, 1999

"My children hated going to the babysitter's. She would yell at them and call them names. They were frightened, and the baby refused to take naps in her home."

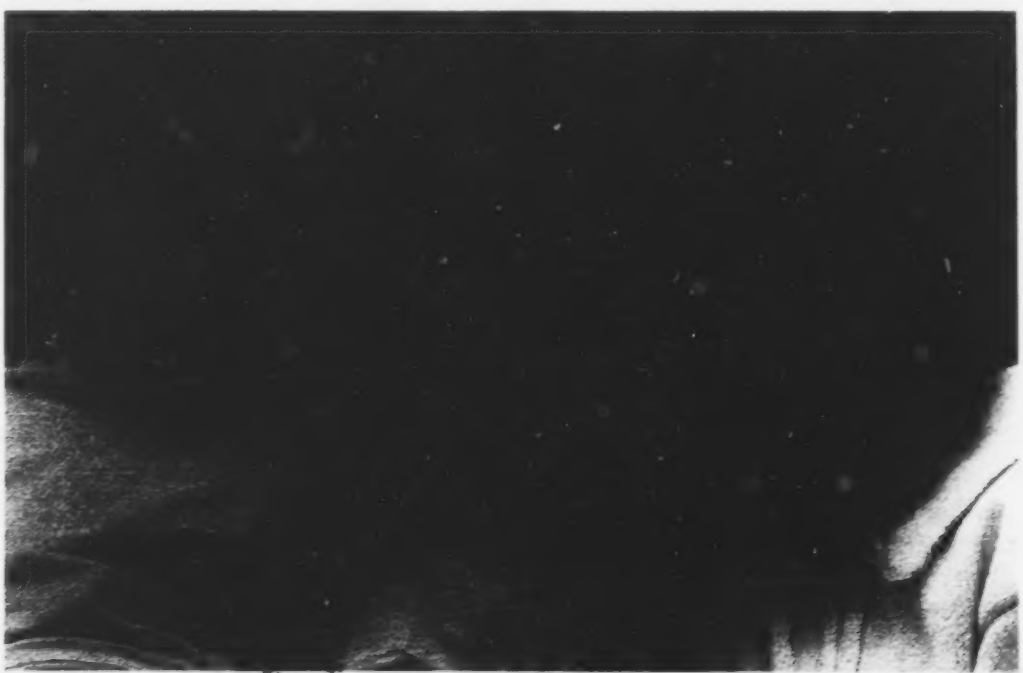
INTRODUCTION

A severe shortage of good quality child care services exists in New York City, a shortage that worsens every day as increasing numbers of mothers enter the labor force, and more and more families on public assistance are required to engage in work-related activities. The need for child care is reflected, in part, by the approximately 40,000, primarily working families eligible for child care subsidies who are currently on City waiting lists. But, because many parents do not know how to get help or do not try because of the long wait, the need for subsidized child care is far greater than is reflected by existing lists. It has been estimated that there are over 200,000 eligible children whose parents would utilize child care assistance if it were available.[2]

While New York City is anticipating having an additional $65.6 million in new child care funds soon, this money will only support 10,000 new child care slots.[3] In light of the growing demand for child care services, this potential expansion addresses a fraction of the need.

As New York City feels the pressures of welfare reform, families moving from welfare to work and low-income working parents – many a step above welfare themselves – are forced to compete for scarce child care subsidies. This not only threatens parents' ability to become and remain self-sufficient, but also denies children access to critical early education and child care services. Because these families can't afford the high quality child care they know is good for their children, many of them are left with untenable and unstable child care options that fail to meet the children's educational and developmental needs. These informal arrangements may also endanger children's health and development, undermine parents' ability to work, and cause family hardship.

This study seeks to put a human face on the numbers by documenting the everyday struggles of low-income working families, and those making the transition from welfare to work, who are unable to obtain good quality, stable child care, and to thus paint a more urgent picture of the need for more good quality subsidized child care in New York City.



MAJOR FINDINGS

The Children's Aid Society (CAS) surveyed 150 parents on child care waiting lists maintained by established community-based child care agencies. Through these conversations, we found that the child care crisis for low-income families is worsening. Our findings dramatically underscore the bottom line: that the lack of good quality, affordable child care hurts both children and parents. ***Overall, our survey documents that the cost of child care for low-income parents is too high, both in monetary and human terms.***

In addition, we found that the complexity of the City's child care "system" defeats our public policy goals, our parents, and most importantly, our children. For example, when there is a fire, we know we must call the Fire Department; if we need a driver's license, we go to the Department of Motor Vehicles. When child care is needed – a service that is essential if we expect parents to work and a service without which educational and welfare reform cannot work – our study found that parents don't know where to go or who's in charge.

Specifically, we found that:

- Waiting for child care assistance places emotional and financial strains on children and parents. **Seventy-seven percent of the families believed that their current child care situations were negatively impacting their children.** Forty-one percent reported having to cut back on other household expenses such as food and children's clothing. (See page 13)

- Families who wait for child care assistance are forced to turn to unregulated, less reliable forms of child care. **Over 70% of families used an unregulated child care arrangement.** (See page 10)

Case Study:
Ms. U

Ms. U has been waiting for a child care subsidy for her oldest child, aged three, for a year and half and recently applied for assistance for her one-year-old as well. Ms. U works full time and earns approximately $200 a week. Ms. U has had difficulty finding reliable child care, and has had to change caregivers approximately four times since she signed up for the waiting list. Currently, Ms. U pays a neighbor $100 a week to care for her children while she works, a full 50% of her earnings.

Ms. U worries constantly about the quality of care her children are receiving, causing her anxiety and stress, and forcing her to miss or be late for work. The caregiver tells Ms. U that her oldest daughter "cries too much," and the children are not allowed to play or "make a mess." The caregiver spends much of the day reprimanding the children. Ms. U is particularly worried that her three-year-old is "not allowed to be a three-year-old," to explore, play, and learn. Ms. U believes that the early years of her children's lives are the most important, and that they should be in an environment where the staff is responsible, professional, and qualified. But, she does not make enough to pay for a high quality child care program and understandably feels restricted by her lack of options.

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BACKGROUND

- Low and moderate-income working families pay disproportionately more for child care than other parents. **Forty-nine percent of the families we spoke with who reported yearly incomes of $6,000 to $12,000 spent between 20% and 50% of their incomes on child care.** (See page 13)

- The lack of quality child care jeopardizes parents' ability to work. **Thirty-six percent (54) of parents said they were either unable to work or lost their jobs, while 20% (30) said they had been late or missed work, and 16% (24) went on public assistance to make ends meet.** (See page 13)

- Our research confirmed that parents know what research has proven: high quality child care is both educationally and socially beneficial for children. **A full 64% of parents interviewed said they wanted child care that stressed education and school readiness skills.** (See page 14)

- Families participating in welfare-to-work activities did not know about their rights to a range of subsidized child care options and the availability of transitional child care benefits once they left welfare for work. Parents were also unaware that they could put their child's name on more than one waiting list, and thus unknowingly limited their options.

- Many low-income working families did not know that they were eligible for a child care subsidy, nor that the Agency for Child Development exists, and is the primary City agency responsible for providing child care assistance.

Child Care in New York City: A Growing Demand

Nationally, only approximately 10% of the 14.7 million children in families eligible to receive a child care subsidy were served in 1998. In New York State, 82% (roughly 470,000) of eligible children did not receive child care assistance during the same year.[4] At the local level, the situation is equally critical. Although New York City is home to the largest publicly subsidized child care system in the country, there is only enough regulated care to serve 30% of the 209,000 children under 6 who may need child care while their parents work.[5]

Over 112,000[6] children are served through a combination of contracted day care centers and family day care homes, Head Start programs (generally providing only part-day services), and vouchers that can be used to pay for any legal form of child care.[7]

Despite this substantial investment ($456.4 million in city fiscal year 1999[8]) the need for child care services is growing at breakneck speed, and demand for services greatly outweighs the supply. While approximately 40,000 children are currently on City waiting lists, it is important to remember that the total number of children who are eligible for subsidies is much larger than just those who are on waiting lists because many parents do not know they can get help or do not try because of the long wait.

But this only paints part of the picture. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has declared that all parents on public assistance must be engaged in work-related activities by the year 2000 as a condition of continuing to receive welfare benefits.[9] With over 360,000 children on public assistance under the age of 12, the need for child care services continues to escalate.[10]

How Do Child Care Subsidies Work?

Two different City agencies administer child care funds. Their target populations, procedures, points of access and payment mechanisms differ. The Administration for Children's Services/Agency for Child Development (ACD) has traditionally administered child care subsidies for primarily low-income families through both contracted programs and vouchers, and manages all Head Start funding. Contracted programs include day care centers and networks of family day care providers that are supported entirely by direct government funding. ACD also administers vouchers that eligible families use to pay for services provided by private day care centers, family day care homes, and informal care providers. The Human Resources Administration (HRA) provides child care assistance for families transitioning from welfare to work through vouchers only. In recent years, most of the expansion of child care services has been in the use of vouchers for unregulated care through HRA. Lastly, the Board of Education provides pre-kindergarten programs to four-year-olds, child care for the children of teen parents, and therapeutic programs for children with special needs.

New York City's Agency for Child Development provides child care subsidies to a portion of income eligible families who are working, engaged in approved work activities, or for other emergency reasons. Because the demand for child care subsidies far outweighs the supply, ACD uses a set of criteria to determine priority for care. Currently, priority is given to families on public assistance in approved work activities, and to meet foster care needs. Eligibility is determined based on the size of the family and its income, as detailed in the table on page 6. Families who receive subsidies pay between one dollar and $90 a week for care,

Case Study:
Ms. K

Ms. K, who earns approximately $15,000 a year working full-time, turned to her sister to care for her children, ages three and five, while she waited for a child care subsidy. This arrangement quickly deteriorated. Ms. K's sister has many personal problems and would have neighbors and other family members watch the children when she was not available. This resulted in extremely haphazard care; her youngest child sometimes had more than six caregivers in a given day. Ms. K explained "My sister is not the most reliable person in the world. She has a lot of problems and I didn't trust her to care for my children." The situation threatened Ms. K's employment, forcing her to be late and miss days. Ms. K told us "my boss let me get away with a lot; I'm lucky I didn't get fired. I always worried about the kids while I was at work."

depending on their income. The exact amount paid is calculated using a sliding scale. Once families are deemed eligible, they are generally put on a waiting list until an available slot opens up. Parents can use subsidies to enroll their children in contracted center-based or family day care homes, or to purchase care at private programs that accept ACD vouchers. They can also use ACD vouchers to purchase informal care.

ACD Income Eligibility Criteria

Family Size	Yearly Income Maximum
2	$27,430
3	29,878
4	31,731
5	34,477
6	37,719

Families transitioning off of welfare primarily access child care services through an entirely different system. These families are eligible to receive Training Related Expenses (TRE's) through the Human Resources Administration that provide reimbursements for child care and transportation costs associated with participation in approved work activities. Parents can use TRE's to pay for day care centers, family care providers or informal providers as long as the cost of care does not exceed the State's market rate. Unlike the ACD system, eligibility is not determined by family income, but by the active and ongoing participation of the parent in a work activity, typically HRA's workfare program.[12] Because parents' compliance in work activities can fluctuate, children served through this system are often forced to move in and out of different child care arrangements. Once parents successfully leave welfare for work, they are eligible to receive transitional child care benefits through HRA for up to 12 months after their public assistance cases are closed. However, parents must reapply for these benefits through a separate application process once they leave welfare.

Why Are Child Care Subsidies Important?

The cost of good quality child care, between $4,000 and $10,000 a year, is often prohibitive, and many low- and middle-income families, struggling to make ends meet, cannot afford it. In fact, a report by the Children's Defense Fund found that parents are likely to pay more for child care per year than for public college tuition.[13] Research has found that child care subsidies are beneficial for families because they enable parents to find and keep work, and provide children with higher quality experiences.

Waiting for assistance, however, often has detrimental consequences. A 1995 report by the Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association found that the vast majority of families who received a child care subsidy utilized a regulated, stable form of child care (either center-based programs or family day care providers) and reported reduced levels of stress.[14] In contrast, families on the waiting list were more likely to use unregulated care and multiple caregivers. The study also documented that once families receive child care assistance, they continue to improve their economic standing and are less reliant on other forms of public aid.[15]

A 1998 California study found that many parents have to make difficult adjustments while waiting for child care. For example, 40% of parents surveyed reported that they had to give up looking for work because they could not find affordable child care.[16] Lastly, North Carolina's Day Care Services Association 1998 study revealed similar findings. Over half of 404 parents surveyed reported using unlicensed child care and having to change child care providers while waiting for a subsidy, as well as severe financial strains and family conflicts.

Why is Good Quality Child Care Important?

But, why is good quality child care important for children? Findings from a soon to be released study provide us with a clear cut and compelling answer:

Early childhood education significantly improves the scholastic success and educational achievements of poor children even into early adulthood.[17]

The Abecedarian Project in North Carolina was a carefully controlled study of 57 low-income children who received full-time, good quality child care from infancy through age five and 54 low-income children who did not receive such services. Children in the first group were provided with individually tailored educational activities that focussed on social, emotional, and cognitive areas of development, with a particular emphasis on language.

The children's progress was monitored over time and follow-up studies were conducted at ages 12, 15, and 21.[18] The study found that over the years, the children who received the intervention scored significantly higher on cognitive tests than children in the control group. Through middle adolescence, the differences between the groups remained large for reading and large-to-moderate for math. Children in the intervention group were significantly more likely to be in school at age 21, and to pursue a four-year college degree, and their employment rates were higher (65% as compared to 50% for the control group). In addition, young adults in the intervention group were, on average, two years older when their first child was born compared to those in the control group (19 years old vs. 17 years old).[19]

The findings of the Abecedarian study build on recent breakthroughs in brain research that demonstrate that experiences during the first three years of life have a substantial impact on children's emotional development, learning abilities, and later success in school and life.[20]

Case Study:
Ms. L

During her two-year wait for a child care subsidy for her three-year-old, Ms. L has used several different caregivers, one of whom would disappear for several days without notice, leaving Ms. L without care for her child. Some days Ms. L is forced to piece together a patchwork of people – sometimes as many as six – to watch her son. Ms. L knows that this type of instability is detrimental for her son who "doesn't know where he's going everyday," as well as for her ability to keep her job. She has been forced to adjust her work schedule to accommodate her chaotic child care arrangements, has been late and missed work several times, and once received a verbal warning from her employer when she brought her son to work because she had no child care.

Abecedarian also substantiates earlier research documenting that although the quality of care is important for all children, those who are at-risk of school failure benefit more from good quality early education opportunities than their peers do.[21] Not only can we now be sure that good quality early education and child care programs positively impact children's development and learning, we also know that poor-quality programs may potentially put children at risk.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children states that the provision of high quality early childhood programs depends upon meeting three basic needs: high quality programming for children, equitable compensation for staff, and affordable services for families.[22] Key indicators of quality include well-trained and stable staff and low child-to-teacher ratios.

METHODOLOGY

The Children's Aid Society surveyed a total of 150 parents. The survey was developed by CAS in conjunction with the Early Childhood Strategic Group. The Early Childhood Strategic Group, of which The Children's Aid Society is a member, is a partnership of 20 individuals and organizations committed to the creation and coordination of well funded early care and education services for all children. The survey was field tested and revised.

Our goals were to:

1. Collect data and information about the experiences of families waiting for child care assistance.

2. Use this data to gauge the impact of the lack of reliable, good quality child care on children and families and document how families cope.

3. Raise public awareness and provide policy-makers with information and recommend-ations for addressing identified problems.

4. Develop strategies that Children's Aid and other early childhood service providers can implement to better serve families in need of good quality child care.

CAS compiled waiting lists from its own day care programs, and conducted outreach to other day care centers and community-based programs to obtain additional waiting lists. Names were then randomly selected from the lists for interviews. The majority of the interviews (90% or 135) were conducted over the phone, with the remainder done in person. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish, as appropriate. In addition, focus groups were conducted with a group of parents at a day care center in Brooklyn.

FINDINGS

About the Families

Of the 150 families surveyed, 125 were on a child care waiting list at the time of the interview, and 25 had recently left a waiting list because they had received a subsidy. The number of children totaled 213.

Number of children in need of child care per household		
One	65%	(97)
Two	28%	(42)
Three	7%	(11)

Ages of children in each household in need of child care		
Under 1	5%	(10) [23]
1	11%	(24)
2	16%	(35)
3	29%	(62)
4	26%	(56)
5	5%	(11)
6	2%	(3)
7	1%	(2)
8	3%	(7)
9	1%	(2)
11	.6%	(1)
Total children: 213		

Ethnicity		
Latino	65%	(97)
Black	35%	(52)
White	1%	(2)
Did not wish to answer	1%	(1)

Note: Columns add up to more than 100% and more than 150 families because some families checked more than one category.

Case Study:
Ms. T

Ms. T is the mother of three children, ages two, four and six. She works full time and earns approximately $15,000 a year. Ms. T's mother and sister have been watching the children, while the family waits for a child care subsidy. When her family members are not available, Ms. T relies on neighbors and on some days the children are shuffled between multiple caregivers. Ms. T pays $100 a week for this care (a full 32% of her income) which she rates as fair, saying "sometimes it seemed like the children were an imposition on the caregiver." The expense has forced her to cut back on food and clothing, and has caused both stress and conflict with family. Ms. T explained that her "children are not bad, they are just children. Some people want them to sit still all day. I would get many complaints [from the caregivers] that would lead to arguments and stressful situations." This tension affected Ms. T's children who would cry and were frightened. Ms. T looks forward to the time when her two older children start school.

Household composition		
One parent	57%	(85)
Two parent	33%	(49)
Reside with other adults	11%	(16)

As the data below illustrate, the majority of the families surveyed had extremely low income levels, indicating that many were living in or close to poverty.[24] A full 76% earned $18,000 a year or less – despite the fact that almost half (73 or 49%) of the parents were working full or part-time. Thirty-nine percent (58) of families surveyed were receiving public assistance at the time they were interviewed.[25]

Yearly income		
Less than $6,000	18%	(27)
6,000-12,000	40%	(60)
12,000-18,000	19%	(28)
18,000-24,000	7%	(11)
24,000-30,000	3%	(5)
30,000-36,000	3%	(5)
36,000-42,000	3%	(5)
more than 42,000	1%	(2)
No response	5%	(7)

Not only were a large number of families working, many others were attempting to better the lives of their families through a variety of activities, resulting in their need for child care assistance.

Reasons for applying for child care assistance		
Working full time	34%	(51)[26]
Working part time	15%	(22)
Looking for work	23%	(34)
Enrolled in a mandated work activity as a condition of receiving public assistance	9%	(13)
Enrolled in a voluntary work activity such as training or an internship	1%	(1)
Attending or planning to attend school	17%	(26)
Other	9%	(14)[27]

What Type of Child Care Do Families Use While They Wait?

Over half (55% or 82) of the families surveyed waited a full year or more for child care assistance. For those families in our study who had received child care assistance, the average waiting period was 16 months. However, the majority of the families we spoke with were still on a waiting list at the time of the survey. These families had been waiting an average of 10 months.

Our findings document that during this time, the lack of child care subsidies often resulted in parents using unregulated, and less reliable forms of child care. Seventy-one percent of parents we interviewed used relatives, friends, and/or neighbors to care for their children while they waited for child care assistance, and only 13% used a regulated form of care. A quarter of the parents stayed home with their children because of the lack of child care. Parents report using more than one arrangement for their children.

Type of Child Care Used by Families Waiting for A Child Care Subsidy		
Day Care Center	7%	(10)[28]
Registered Family Day Care Provider	6%	(9)
Relative	41%	(62)
Friend or Neighbor	30%	(45)
Parent Stayed Home	27%	(41)
Mother took child to work	.6%	(1)

What Is the Child Care Like?

Twenty-eight percent (42) of parents reported having multiple caregivers on a given day, and 55% (82) had to change child care arrangements at least once while on the waiting list, illustrating the unstable nature of the care used by many families who lack child care assistance. Such unreliability puts a severe strain on parents and their children. It is easy to see why many of the parents we

spoke with were not pleased with the quality of child care they were using. Indeed, 37% (56) of parents surveyed rated their child care as fair to poor. When asked why they would evaluate their care this way, we heard numerous disturbing stories about children who were left in the care of an informal caregiver – some of which clearly illustrate that the safety of children was compromised:

"The one time I used my neighbor to care for my child who is in a wheelchair, he fell and broke his arm. This was the last time I left my son with anyone."

"When I picked up my 18-month-old at the babysitter's, her Pamper was not changed and she was restrained. She cried every time we went to the sitter's home."

"I had one provider who left my child alone in her apartment when my daughter was one and half years old."

"The babysitter left my daughter alone with a 10-year-old girl. My child was not fed, cleaned, or played with."

"One evening as I arrived to pick up my daughter from the babysitter's home, her husband hit my daughter."

"The babysitter locked the girls up in a room all day and let my son, who is overactive, do whatever he wanted."

What Are the Emotional Costs of Waiting?

Sadly, many parents told us that the stress of using unstable, low quality child care has substantial negative consequences for themselves and their children. Sixty-eight percent (102) of parents reported experiencing high levels of stress, 17% (26) said the lack of child care assistance caused conflict with their spouse or other family members, and 11% (16) said they experienced health

Case Study:
Ms. R

Ms. R, the mother of an infant and a three-year-old, applied for a child care subsidy in order to work. *While waiting for assistance, Ms. R turned to relatives for help watching her children. Ms. R, who earned approximately $155 a week, paid approximately $70 a week for child care, a staggering 45% of her income. The financial strain of paying the full cost of child care forced the family to pay the rent and electric bill late, and even to cut back on food. Ms. R reluctantly related how she once had to send her children to bed after having given them only milk for dinner because it was all she had.*

Such care has not only placed a financial strain on the family, it has also had a negative impact on Ms. R's daughter. During six months on the waiting list, the family has had to switch caregivers three times. Ms. R rates the quality of care her children have received as poor, saying that her daughter has not learned anything of value, has picked up inappropriate behavior such as swearing, and has become disrespectful. The little girl has told her mother that she doesn't like being left with so many different people, and Ms. R stated that "it's like she's mad at me." Ms. R would prefer that her daughter spend her days in a day care center where she could learn how to behave and interact with other children, as well as be prepared for school.

problems as a result of waiting for a child care subsidy. Perhaps most disturbing, parents also told us that they believed their children were being negatively impacted.

Effects on Children of Waiting for a Child Care Subsidy		
Lack of opportunity to be with other children	59%	(89)[29]
Lack of exposure to stimulating activities	59%	(89)
No effect	21%	(32)
Not adequately prepared for school	5%	(8)
Emotional/behavior problems	10%	(15)
Sleeping problems	2%	(3)
Difficulties in school	1%	(2)

The parents' words help us to go beyond the numbers and better understand the effects on children:

"My babysitter is always complaining that my daughter cries too much. She doesn't allow my daughter to play because she doesn't want a mess in her home. She reprimands her and my daughter doesn't want to be there, but I have no choice. I have to go to work."

"My two-year-old needs special attention and he's not getting it. He gets yelled at a lot and people don't understand that he can't help it. He's a good boy, but active; he takes a lot of patience."

"My daughter has started to swear, fight, and has become disrespectful."

"My child is not getting the attention or care that she needs."

"My daughter started wetting the bed."

"My son's babysitter is his 76-year-old grandmother who cares for his physical needs, but doesn't stimulate him intellectually."

What Are the Financial Costs of Waiting?

Extreme financial pressures exacerbate the emotional strain under which families live. We found that the inability to access child care assistance puts many low-income families in dire financial straits, forcing them to make difficult choices. The majority of the parents surveyed (51% or 76) paid for care while on the waiting list, with most paying between $40 and $100 a week. Carrying the full cost of care results in families of limited means spending a disproportionate amount on child care. Some families we surveyed paid more than 40% of their income for child

care. One mother told us she feels as if she is working to pay for child care for her two children, and she and her husband – who earn approximately $20,000 a year – have used up all their savings, gone into debt, and borrowed money from family and friends.

Income and Percentage Spent on Child Care

Yearly income	Average % of Income Spent on Child Care
Less than $6,000	33
6,000-12,000	43
12,000-18,000	30
18,000-24,000	20
24,000-30,000	16
30,000-36,000	13
36,000-42,000	13
more than 42,000	13

In contrast, middle- to upper-income families generally pay between six and eight percent of their income on child care.[9] It is no wonder that the families we spoke with told us about serious financial impacts of having to wait for a child care subsidy. Forty-one percent (62) of families surveyed reported having to cut back on other household expenses such as food and clothing for their children. Many parents used up savings, went into debt, and/or borrowed money to pay for care so they could keep working.

What Do Parents Want for Their Children?

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of parents we spoke with said they would prefer to use a regulated form of child care – a day care center, Head Start program or registered family day care provider – if they could use any kind of child care. In this study, it is important to keep in mind that the strong preference for center-based care, over other forms of regulated care, may reflect the fact that the majority of the families surveyed were selected from day care center waiting lists.

Case Study:
Ms. O

Ms. O and her husband, who earn approximately $13,000 a year, applied for child care assistance for their three-year-old daughter. While waiting, they turned to a neighbor whom they paid $75 a week, about 30% of their income. This put the family under severe financial strain, forcing them to cut back on household expenses, use up their savings, incur debt and borrow money from family and friends. Adding to their stress, Ms. O rated the care her child received as poor. Because she had suspicions about the quality of care her daughter was receiving, Ms. O, made a surprise visit to the caregiver's home and found that the child had been left alone with a 10-year-old. Ms. O found another informal provider, but could not bring herself to leave her child there, and left her job so she could care for her child herself.

As the stories of our families illustrate, the lack of reliable child care often threatens the ability of low- and middle-income working parents to maintain employment, and even forces some onto welfare.

Parents' child care preferences		
Day care center	71%	(106)[31]
Registered family day care provider	19%	(28)
Head Start program	30%	(45)
Relative	1%	(2)
Friend or neighbor	4%	(6)
After-school program	2%	(3)

Reasons for parents' child care preferences		
Safety	31%	(46)[32]
Educationally beneficial	64%	(96)
Interaction with other children	62%	(93)
Makes parent feel comfortable	21%	(32)
Reliability	13%	(19)
Other	4%	(9)

When parents were asked to elaborate on why they wanted this for their children, we were repeatedly told such things as:

"My kids don't learn much when they spend all day inside watching TV."

"My oldest child has special needs and I think that not being able to attend a Head Start program caused her further delays. She was not ready for school when she entered kindergarten."

"My children need to form friendships and learn to share."

"I believe the early years are most important and children need to be in day care where the staff is responsible, professional, qualified and reliable."

"My son is hyperactive and needs a lot of attention. He would really benefit from a good day care program."

"I want my children to learn English and interact with other children."

How Does Receiving a Child Care Subsidy Help?

Of the 150 parents we surveyed, 25 with a total of 31 children had recently obtained child care assistance after being on a waiting list. The vast majority of these families, (92% or 23) have been using a regulated form of child care since receiving the subsidy.

Day care center	60%	(15)[33]
Registered family day care provider	24%	(6)
Head Start program	12%	(3)
Relative	4%	(2)

Parents told us that a child care subsidy not only helped them financially, but also positively affected their children, and these parents overwhelmingly rated their child care as good to excellent. In our conversations, many parents cited elements which are known to be critical to insuring high quality early education and child care services – a well-qualified, well-compensated workforce, low staff turnover, high staff-to-child ratios, and thoughtful, consistent programming. The parents' comments make clear that these services have made real differences in their families' lives.

"I am very pleased with the day care. My daughter is learning English, she seems relaxed and at ease with the other children."

"My child is learning more now that she is in Head Start. She knows her colors and numbers, and can spell her own name."

"She [the family day care provider] gives the children healthy food, plays with them and takes them to the park. She's older and has been doing this for a long time."

"My child's day care is excellent because they have good supervision, they are very interested in the children and the children are learning and it shows."

"I like the family [day care] provider because she is caring and attentive to my child."

"My son's day care is excellent. You can tell the staff is qualified and they are professional in the way that they talk to parents. The day care center is a good environment for my son."

Lack of Information Inhibits Access to Child Care

Although our survey was not focused on collecting information on parents' knowledge of child care service delivery systems, we were surprised by how frequently these issues arose during our conversations. As previously mentioned, for working families, the system seems to fall apart at the very beginning of the process. Many of the families we spoke with were not aware of the existence of the Agency for Child Development and that ACD is the City agency responsible for providing child care assistance. Many parents also did not know that they could put their name on more than one waiting list, and instead limited their application process to one or two child care programs.

Families transitioning off welfare also experienced problems early on in their search for child care assistance, but with some significant differences. These families were provided with a child care subsidy immediately upon enrollment in the workfare program or other approved work activity. However, the shortage of available child care openings in regulated programs, coupled with an extreme lack of assistance given to these parents about finding and selecting quality child care led many to rely on informal child care arrangements.[14] In addition, we found that many parents who had participated in welfare reform activities were unaware of the availability of transitional child care benefits once they became employed.

Case Study:
Ms. H

Ms. H has waited for child care assistance for her now three-year-old for one and a half years. During that time, Ms. H tried two different child care arrangements, neither of which worked out. One caregiver left the child alone in her apartment when she was one year old. Then, while enrolled in a private nursery school, the child fell down and broke a tooth, but the school failed to notify Ms. H. The lack of safe, affordable child care caused Ms. H significant stress and contributed to a bout of depression, and eventually forced Ms. H to stop working and go on public assistance. Now, after much struggle, Ms. H has secured a pre-kindergarten slot in a day care center and is working again.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Numerous excellent recommendations to improve the quality of child care in New York City have been made over the years, and many are still valid. However, our study dramatically highlights the need to adopt a universal approach to child care. ***Early childhood services need to be seen as an integral component of the educational continuum for all children.***

To achieve this goal, the City and State must address the following two goals in the next year: ***expand access to quality early childhood services and create a single child care structure in New York City.*** In calling for these ambitious goals, we do not underestimate the enormous complexity of re-organizing the existing bureaucracies, and expanding services effectively. However, new opportunities make this undertaking not only critical, but also possible. The recently passed New York State budget has allocated an additional $64.1 million to New York City for child care, and the New York City Council has provided an additional $1.5 million for a total of $65.6 million in new child care dollars. These funds need to be spent within the next six months and require the City administration to present a comprehensive plan for developing and expanding child care services for families.

This funding, however, will only support the creation of an additional 10,000 slots, clearly not enough to meet the need. Additional resources must be identified and utilized to dramatically expand services.

New research that once again validates the long-term benefits of quality early education, and the exploding needs of working parents, makes this a pivotal moment for change. The time is right for New York City to dramatically expand the availability of quality child care, and, like the Fire Department or the Department of Motor Vehicles, put a single agency in charge. The resources, the knowledge and the need are all there. What is missing is the will to make child care a high enough priority to create a truly responsive and effective structure to provide it to all New York City children and families.

Specifically, The Children's Aid Society recommends the following:

1. Additional child care funding must be used to expand the supply of regulated, quality child care.

- Locate additional federal, state and city funds to expand services to reach all eligible children and families with good quality child care and early education opportunities.
- Allocate funding to expand existing services and develop new family day care and center-based programs.
- Set aside funding for staff training, professional development, and other efforts aimed at enhancing quality.

2. A single agency should administer all child care subsidies in New York City.

- Create one point of entry for parents and one standard of eligibility for child care that is based on income.
- Drop the distinction between low-income working parents and parents transitioning off welfare. All parents should have equal access to child care.
- Provide one-on-one assistance to parents as well as supportive consultation provided by well trained, knowledgeable staff, such as child care resource and referral counselors and caseworkers who can clearly and simply explain child care options and how to access them. Repeat the messages about the availability of child care subsidies at every point of contact with parents.

CONCLUSION

This is a critical time for children and parents in New York City. More parents are in the workforce than ever before, parents who receive public assistance are being required to work, new educational standards make children's readiness for school even more critical. Research has demonstrated how important good quality child care is to help children enter school ready to learn, to help their young brains develop to their fullest potential, and to help parents become and remain productive workers. New York City has the ability, now, to assemble the funding streams necessary to provide every eligible family with the child care and early education services that will help both parents and children succeed. The bottom line is we need more funding and more good quality, regulated child care. The families of New York City cannot afford to wait any longer.

The Children's Aid Society

The Mission

For nearly 147 years, The Children's Aid Society has had a single mission: to do whatever New York City's neediest children need. Our goal is to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of children and families, and to provide every child with the support and opportunities needed to become a happy, healthy and successful adult. Our services address every aspect of a child's life, from infancy through adolescence, and include education, health, counseling, adoption and foster care, career readiness, arts and recreation, and emergency assistance.

The History

The idea of an organization devoted to children was revolutionary when Charles Loring Brace and a small group of social reformers came together to found the Society in 1853. It was revolutionary to think in terms of saving children, revolutionary even to see their needs.

Today, the Society serves over 120,000 children and their families each year, in all parts of the city and surrounding areas, without regard to race, religion, nationality or socio-economic status. We work through community centers, camps, public schools, courts and in the children's own homes. While most of our work is in New York City, we have started teen pregnancy prevention programs and community schools in almost 100 cities throughout the United States.

With 36 sites and an annual operating budget of over $50 million, the Society is one of the country's oldest and largest child welfare agencies. Finally, over 91 cents out of every expense dollar of the Society is spent directly on services to the children.

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Footnotes

1. Parent interviewed by The Children's Aid Society, July 1999.

2. *Estimating the Need for Subsidized Child Care in New York City, Citizen's* Committee for Children, November, 1999.

3. Early Childhood Strategic Group, FY2000 Budget Proposal to the New York City Council, November 15, 1999.

4. Press Release for *Access to Child Care for Low-income Working Families*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, October 19, 1999.

5. *A Child Care Primer*, Child Care, Inc., 1998, p. 2 of summary.

6. In FY 1999, a total of 59,743 children were enrolled in subsidized child care through the Administration for Children's Services/ Agency for Child Development, 17,409 children were enrolled in Head Start, and child care for 17,409 children was being paid for by the Human Resources Administration. *Fiscal 1999 Mayor's Management Report, Volume II: Agency and Citywide Indicators*, The City of New York, September 1999, p. 118, and statements made by Kay Hendon, Child Care Liaison for NYC Human Resources Administration, on September 24, 1999 at the UJA Federation.

7. Center-based programs are day care centers that offer full-day, year-round care for children from infancy until they reach school-age. Some centers also operate after-school programs. Most New York City centers are operated by community-based organizations and all are licensed by the City's Department of Health. Family day care is care that takes place in a provider's home for up to six children. Registration is conducted by the City's Department of Health. Head Start is a federally funded pre-school program that provides comprehensive early childhood services for preschool children whose families' incomes are below the poverty level.

8. This includes all federal, state and city funding for both ACS and HRA. From *A Child Care Primer*, 1998, p. 28.

9. *Op Cit., Mayor's Management Report, Volume I: Agency Narratives*, p. 249.

10. *A Child Care Primer*, Child Care, Inc., 1998, p.1.

11. Informal providers are family, friends and neighbors who provide home-based care. Such care is legal as long as the provider does not care for more than two children who are unrelated to her/him. Informal care is un-regulated, that is, not licensed or monitored by any regulatory agency.

12. The City's workfare program, officially known as the Work Experience Program (WEP), engages individuals on public assistance in work experience internships in City and nonprofit agencies for an average of 20 hours a week. WEP workers are also required to engage in an additional 15 hours a week of concurrent activities such as GED preparation.

13. Children's Defense Fund Fact Sheet: *Parents Face Higher Tuition for Child Care than College*, August 11, 1999.

14. *Valuing Families: The High Cost of Waiting for Child Care Sliding Fee Assistance*, The Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association, 1995, p. 11.

15. Ibid., p. 17.

16. *Waiting for Child Care: How Do Parents Adjust to Scarce Options in Santa Clara County?* Policy Analysis for California Education, 1998, p. 10.

17. The Carolina Abecedarian Project Press Release, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, October 21, 1999.

18. *Early Learning, Later Success: The Abecedarian Study*, Executive Summary, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, October 21, 1999, p. 2.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

20. *Brain Facts*, I Am Your Child Campaign website, p. 2.

21. Children's Defense Fund, Why Quality Child Care and Early Education Matters, p.1 based on findings from *The Children of the Cost, Quality and Outcomes Study Go to School*, Cost, Quality and Outcomes Study Team, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, June 1999. See also *Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children*, Carnegie Corporation of New York, April 1994.

22. *Position Statement on Quality, Compensation and Affordability*, The National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1987, 1995, p. 1.

23. Percentages are based on the total number of children (213).

24. Federal guidelines state that a family of four with an annual income of $16,700 or less is defined as living in poverty. *Federal Register*, Vol. 64, No. 52, March 18,1999, pp. 13428.

25. In addition to these 58 families who reported receiving cash assistance, six families were receiving food stamps only, three were receiving food stamps and Medicaid, one was receiving only Medicaid, and one was receiving SSI benefits.

26. Responses add up to more than 100% because some parents gave multiple answers.

27. This includes: pregnancy, child with special needs, foster parenting, parent's mental illness, and desire of parent to have child enrolled in a day care program.

28. Percentages are based on total number of families surveyed. To tabulate this data, we included one response per family, if the family used the same type of care for each child. The percentages add up to more than 100 because some families with more than

A Sampling of Services

"12 Months to Permanency"
A national model that demonstrates that safe and permanent homes for foster children can be found in 12 months or less, instead of the national average of almost four years.

Community Schools *A partnership with the New York City Board of Education in public schools that provides full health, dental and social services, after school, and adult education in schools that are open up to 15 hours a day, 6 days a week, all year. National winner of the "Peter Drucker Award for Nonprofit Innovation."*

Health Services *Our network of health, mental health, eye care and dental clinics, which tally nearly 50,000 appointments for children each year, includes "Big Blue," our mobile dental van that brings dental care direct to thousands of children in the poorest parts of the city.*

Mentoring Programs *Among them: a corporate tutoring program for preteens at risk of drop-out, and a partnership with the black and Latino bar associations that matches minority boys and girls with lawyers and judges; both programs have an over-90% "stay in schoo!" rate.*

Teen Pregnancy Prevention *A holistic approach that combines sexuality education with a full youth development program, based on the philosophy that education and jobs create the opportunity for a better future.*

Homeless Services *Transitional housing for homeless families with children that has found permanent housing for more families, more quickly, than any other city agency.*

Carmel Hill *A block-wide renewal project on West 118th Street that rebuilds lives by helping to rehabilitate buildings and connecting needy families to CAS and government-provided services.*

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one child used different types of care, and some families with one child used multiple forms of care for that child.

29. Percentages are based on the total number of families surveyed. To tabulate this data, we included one response per family, if the parent had one child in need of care or cited the same impact for each child. The percentages add up to more than 100 because some parents cited multiple effects and/or had more than one child in question.

30. *Ibid., Position Statement: Quality, Compensation, and Affordability*, p. 2.

31. Percentages are based on total number of families surveyed. To tabulate this data, we included one response per family, if the parent cited the same type of care for each child. The percentages add up to more than 100 because some families with more than one child preferred different types of care.

32. Percentages are based on the total number of families surveyed and add up to more than 100 because some parents had more than one child and/or cited multiple reasons.

33. Percentages are based on the total number of families surveyed who had received a child care subsidy. The number of arrangements adds up to more than 25 because one family used two different types of child care (a day care center and a registered family day care provider).

34. These findings mirror those of two earlier reports: *Welfare and Child Care: What About the Children?*, Public Advocate for the City of New York, June, 1997; and *Helping Public Assistance Families Make Good Child Care Choices*, Child Care, Inc., August, 1998. For example, both reports document that parents receive extremely limited information about regulated child care options, as well as the existence of transitional child care benefits.

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